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PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHAE #0463 1411159  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 211159Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8865  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1355  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1533  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0610  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ

UNCLAS ASMARA 000463

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LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS  
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM ER

SUBJECT: INDEPENDENCE DAY DOES NOT MEAN FREEDOM IN ERITREA

¶11. In the days leading up to Eritrean Independence day on May 24, the Government of Eritrea flexes its muscles and shows again to the people of Eritrea how Eritrean independence does not equal freedom. The streets of Asmara are flooded with soldiers, in small and large groups. Placed at intervals as short as two blocks, the soldiers stop pedestrians, cyclists and drivers asking for their identification papers and permits. In traveling less than one mile, an individual can be stopped four or five times and asked to show the proper papers. Carrying guns and sticks, the soldiers make an intimidating and frightening force, leading some Eritreans to elect to stay home. One Eritrean father imposed a 7pm curfew on his four sons and made it clear this family curfew was non-negotiable. There are unconfirmed reports that gender-based violence by the police, national security officers and military patrols is increasing as well.

¶12. Complementing the increased force on the streets, the GSE has restricted the movement of all expatriates. From May 20 to May 30, all roads outside of Asmara are closed to travel by foreigners. One Eritrean commented, without any irony, to an Embassy family member, "the roads are closed for freedom day." While the GSE has not clarified the restriction, most believe that Eritreans may travel freely without limitations during this time, while foreigners are not permitted to travel from Asmara.

¶13. Comment: This time of year the GSE typically increases security on the streets. Complementing the usual police with military support, the visible presence accentuates the repression felt by Eritreans on a daily basis and serves as a reminder that charming Asmara is really the capital of a police state. End comment.

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